

Caswell Memorial State Park



Our Mission

The mission of the California Department of Parks and Recreation is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.



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Caswell Memorial State Park

28000 South Austin Road

Ripon, CA 95366

(209) 599-3810

*To enter this ancient
forest is to step back
in time and glimpse a
riparian woodland of
long ago.*



A small, wild refuge in the midst of California's Great Central Valley, Caswell Memorial State Park is situated on the Stanislaus River near the town of Ripon. This special river park's 258 acres protect what is considered one of California's finest examples of a mature oak riparian forest. While once they were a prominent feature in the landscape of the Central Valley, today these riparian forests are extremely rare.

The Stanislaus River winds along the south side of the campground and day-use areas. The park offers activities such as camping, picnicking, swimming, fishing, tubing from the campground to the day-use area, bird watching, and hiking. Fishing is popular, and fishing spots are plentiful along the sandy main channel of the Stanislaus River or the extremely slow moving oxbows. Largemouth and smallmouth bass, catfish, bullhead, blue gill and other sunfish, crappie, and pike minnow thrive here year round, and striped bass and Chinook salmon migrate through the area.

PARK HISTORY

Prior to 1800 there was little evidence of human influence on the interior of California. The Yokuts, who were known for their artistry

in creating baskets, lived in the forests along the Tuolumne, San Joaquin and Stanislaus Rivers. Fishing, acorn harvesting and deer hunting provided a rich, stable food supply.

The Spanish began establishing a mission system along the coast of California in the mid-1700s. The influence of the missions on the native people triggered a rapid change in the Yokuts culture.

The area surrounding the Stanislaus river became historically significant when, in 1829, a former neophyte from the Mission San José named Estanislao led an uprising against the Mexican army. After four attempts, the Mexican army defeated Estanislao and his followers, and the river came to be known as "Rio de Estanislao," in honor of the brave chieftain whose Christian name is Spanish for Stanislaus.

The Yokuts way of life began its decline during the 1830s. Vast numbers of native people died from disease, the harsh life at the missions and war. In 1833 a severe malaria outbreak killed one-third to one-half of



Thomas Caswell on his Modesto ranch, ca. 1920

the population. Four years later a smallpox epidemic swept through the California Indian population. The riparian forest that would become the park came under the ownership of Thomas Caswell, a farm equipment manufacturer and rancher, in 1915 when he purchased 700 acres along the Stanislaus River. In 1950 the Caswell family created a legacy for the people of California by donating 134 acres of forest

to be preserved as a state park so that future generations might experience the valley in its natural state.

NATURAL HISTORY

One of the rarest habitats in California is the riparian woodland. The term "riparian" refers to vegetation or habitat along rivers and streams. A vast forest once covered much of the Central Valley's riverbanks and floodplains. What you see in the park today is just a remnant of this once much larger forest. Thanks to the forethought of the Caswell Family in protecting what was left, the park now houses a large area of mature riparian forest.

There is a variety of micro-climates within the riparian zone, and as a result the vegetation is a mosaic of different species. Dense willow groves grow along the shore of the river. Willows also occur in the lower, wetter areas within the park and provide excellent feeding, nesting and shelter for many





Swimming in the Stanislaus River and hiking the park's many trails are two popular activities.



species of small birds. Just inland from the willows, but still in the wetter and more frequently flooded areas, are found the cottonwoods.

Being some of the tallest trees, they provide nesting habitat for the threatened Swainson hawk and other raptors and owls. Sycamore trees are also found in this area. Higher areas that historically were flooded for shorter periods of time are predominately vegetated with a valley oak forest.

surrounding trees.

The valley's riparian woodland has been devastated by water reclamation and flood control efforts. As the habitat has receded, the riparian brush rabbit and riparian woodrat have become endangered, and a large conservation effort by a number of agencies is working on recovering these species.

A rich understory of wild rose, blackberry, currants and sedges flourishes. This tangle of undergrowth provides protection and food for a large variety of wildlife, such as rabbits, woodrats, raccoons, weasels, skunks, foxes and opossums. In the evenings, listen for the great horned owls hooting in the

ups are not available. The group campground will accommodate tent camping for up to 50 people, though it has been known to flood during the spring.

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

- Oak Grove Picnic Area and connecting routes. Restrooms allow either front or side transfer.
- One-quarter-mile of the self-guided loop trail.
- A beach wheelchair is available.

Call (209) 599-3810 for information. Accessibility is improving. Call the park or visit <http://access.parks.ca.gov> for more details.

NEARBY STATE PARKS

George J. Hatfield State Recreation Area, 28 miles west of Merced on Kelly Rd., (209) 632-1852

McConnell State Recreation Area, 5 miles southeast of Delhi on Pepper Rd., (209) 394-7755

Turlock Lake State Recreation Area, 22 miles east of Modesto off Hwy. 132, (209) 874-2056

Great Valley Grasslands State Park, 5 miles east of Gustine, (209) 826-1197

RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Trails

One of the most magnificent aspects of the park is an abundance of extensive nature trails. The trails offer a glimpse of what the riparian ecosystem of the valley looks like in its natural state.

Camping

In a pleasant, wooded area beside the river there are 65 family campsites, each with a table, camp stove and food locker. The sites will accommodate trailers up to 21 feet long or motor homes up to 24 feet. Hook-

PLEASE REMEMBER

- Dogs must be kept on a leash no more than 6 feet long and in an enclosed vehicle or tent at night. Dogs are not allowed on trails or beaches.
- Wood gathering is prohibited. All park resources, including plants and animals, are fully protected by law.
- Quiet hours are 10 p.m. to 8 a.m. Generators may be operated between 10 a.m. and 8 p.m. only.
- Park only in the areas indicated and observe speed limits.



Great Horned Owl

The majestic valley oak is the largest species of oak in the United States. Some of these mature oaks are more than 60 feet tall, with a circumference of up to 17 feet. Valley oaks produce long, slender acorns. Many insects, birds and mammals depend on these acorns as their main food source for part of the year.



Caswell Memorial State Park

Legend

| | | | |
|--|---|--|-------------------|
| | Paved road | | Group Picnic Area |
| | Trail with mileage | | Hand Launch |
| | Self-Guided Loop Trail | | Parking |
| | Self-Guided Loop Trail (Wheelchair Assistance Recommended) | | Picnic Area |
| | Accessible Feature | | Ranger Station |
| | Campfire Center | | Restrooms |
| | Campground | | Showers |
| | Group Campground | | Swimming |

